

COMMENTARY: New deal brings reassurance

By Brendan Stiles

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With the news Tuesday that [Fran McCaffery had signed a new seven-year deal](#) that would keep him as Iowa's head coach through the 2018-19 season, it provides reassurance. Not only to him, but to his players, his coaching staff, his family, high school kids he intends to recruit, Hawkeye basketball fans, the university and so on.

Reassurance is a comforting theme for many considering how tumultuous the state of the Iowa program was when McCaffery first inherited it two years ago. Combining the improvements made the past two seasons by the Hawkeyes on the court – which includes a win in the first round of the NIT last March – along with renovations to Carver-Hawkeye Arena being completed last year and now this new contract, everything is slowly starting to come together for McCaffery and the vision he first had in 2010.

Tuesday afternoon gave McCaffery a chance to present that reassurance on numerous fronts. His three assistant coaches he brought with him to Iowa City – Kirk Speraw, Sherman Dillard and Andrew Francis – now have similar job security as well. They obviously don't make the same income as McCaffery, but they all have a chance to remain on the same page together as a coaching staff, which will only prove of benefit to their players in the seasons ahead.

The players that will be asked to carry the biggest loads for the team this upcoming season now have reassurance that they'll only play for one head coach, as do any future recruits who sign with Iowa in the immediate years ahead. In a

day and age where who the coach is matters as much, and probably more, to a recruit than any school's tradition, kids who want to play for McCaffery at Iowa can take solace in the fact that he'll be their guy from start to finish if they go there.

As he goes back on the road Wednesday for two weeks of recruiting, McCaffery now has this new contract as evidence of his commitment to the program, the same type of commitment he's seeking from the kids he desire to someday wear Hawkeye uniforms.

"It will be nice to be able to tell particular recruits and their families that this thing is solid," McCaffery said.

For the fans, McCaffery made clear Tuesday that Iowa is where he wants to be. He has zero aspirations of ever taking another gig, whether it'd be in the NBA or another Division-I program. He also wanted it known that he doesn't view Iowa as a "stepping stone" job and that he doesn't believe any head coaching position in the Big Ten should be considered one.

Then there's his family. Before McCaffery took the Iowa job in 2010, he had prior coaching stints at three different programs and spent 11 seasons as an assistant at another. He and his wife Margaret have four children that can all take comfort in knowing that they'll be able to grow up in one place, which for McCaffery, means just as much as the direction he's taking the Iowa program.

"As they become more and more established and comfortable, to be able to know that they're happy and that we're going to be able to continue to provide that stability for them is very important," McCaffery said.

He also mentioned the connections he has made across the board, whether it's with other head coaches like Kirk Ferentz and Lisa Bluder or with UI President Sally Mason. Such connections are only to get stronger now and prove beneficial

to the UI community.

Finally, there's the Big Ten, which will probably be the toughest conference in college hoops once again in 2012-13. With growing expectations, the pressure might start to mount. But given the strides made by the Hawkeyes over the last two years, McCaffery believes he can win with his current group of guys, saying NCAA tourney hopes should be "legitimate."

Should Iowa be among the 68 teams to partake in March Madness eight months from now, the odds of the Hawkeyes not only becoming an upper-echelon Big Ten team, but staying one under McCaffery should be considered just as realistic.

"It's definitely achievable," McCaffery said. "We recognize the challenge ahead, but that's clearly the goal."

Iowa basketball might not be going through as adverse a time as it did two years ago, but McCaffery's message remains the same two years later.

To all those associated with him and his program, that ought to prove reassuring.